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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINGSTON 002697

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [JM](#)

SUBJECT: LEADING POLLSTER ON UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas C. Tighe. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) On December 9th, respected veteran pollster Don Anderson (protect) discussed electoral issues with Pol/EconCouns and Poloff. Anderson described Peoples National Party (PNP) Member of Parliament and government minister Portia Simpson Miller as a strong contender to become the next leader of the PNP. Contrasting her strong popular support with vigorous opposition to her advancement by elements of her own party, Anderson considered it likely that Simpson Miller would retire from politics if she felt she was "shafted" by her party by not being elected president of the PNP despite a majority of support from the populous. Anderson also commented on Jamaica Labor Party/Opposition Leader Bruce Golding and what seems to be a return to his relationship with "gunmen" since he resigned from the National Democratic Movement party and returned to and became leader of the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP). Anderson opined that the Prime Minister will most likely call elections after the Cricket World Cup that is scheduled to take place in Jamaica and throughout the CARICOM region in March-April 2007. End summary.

Portia Polls Well

2. (C) On December 9th, Pol/EconCouns and PolOff met with Don Anderson (protect), a respected veteran pollster who conducts surveys for the "Jamaica Gleaner" newspaper, other well-known Jamaican enterprises, and, he admitted, some politicians. (Note: Anderson readily acknowledged that Simpson Miller and her advisors call him frequently for his insights, and that the Minister had named him to the Jamaican Olympic Association. He maintained, however, that he keeps a professional and personal distance from all politicians, observing that, "I hope to go to my grave owing none of them any favors." End note.)

3. (C) Anderson discussed Peoples National Party (PNP) Member of Parliament Portia Simpson Miller and her strong popular support to become the next leader of the PNP. Asked about the questions about her class, intellect, and suitability for the top job often leveled against Simpson Miller by PNP opponents, Anderson replied that critics often suggested that her three declared PNP rivals (two of whom hold doctorates and one of whom is a medical doctor) would refuse to serve in a PNP government led by Simpson Miller, who, he said, earned her bachelor's degree by correspondence less than a decade ago. Simpson Miller is well aware that such criticism is intended to portray her as unworthy to lead the government, but that she chooses to bide her time rather than respond publicly. He cited her decision in Parliament to abstain from an Opposition-led parliamentary motion against the government for chronically underfunding the Fire Brigade - angering fellow PNP MPs who were attempting to kill the motion as a majority bloc by simply voting it down - had resulted in a four-to-five percent increase in her national popularity, portraying her as someone willing to vote on principle in the national interest rather than strictly along party lines.

4. (C) According to Anderson, his polling indicates that Simpson Miller clearly has a majority of popular support to become the next president of the PNP and is significantly ahead of the competition. However, Anderson does not believe she has a majority of support of the approximately 4500 PNP delegates who will vote to determine the next party president. Anderson predicted that Prime Minister P.J. Patterson will call the internal election in late January or early February 2006. Whoever is elected president of the PNP would be appointed Prime Minister by the Governor General, and lead the PNP and the Government into the next general elections which must be held by October 2007. Anderson offered the view that if Simpson Miller, who is married to former senior Cable & Wireless executive Errald Miller, is not elected president of the PNP by the delegates despite her acknowledged popular support, she may decide to retire from politics and allow her party to "lie in the bed they made", e.g., face Jamaica Labor Party's Bruce Golding without her support or, presumably, that of her numerous die-hard

supporters. In 1992, Simpson Miller contested the party leadership against Prime Minister Patterson, who defeated her handily.

The JLP's Golding: Reformist Urges Meet Ugly Reality?

15. (C) Anderson was critical of Bruce Golding, who earned national plaudits in 1995 when he denounced political corruption and leading politicians' willingness to associate with criminals, and left the JLP to found the National Democratic Movement (NDM). Golding returned to the JLP shortly before the 2002 elections, which the JLP narrowly lost; Anderson said that many Laborites, increasingly desperate to return to government they last controlled in 1989, hold Golding responsible for their 2002 defeat. He specifically faulted Golding for what he described as a return to his relationship with gunmen since he returned to the JLP, but noted that Golding's decision to compete for the West Kingston seat being vacated by longtime JLP leader and former Prime Minister Edward Seaga, had perhaps made such unsavory associations inevitable. (Note: Golding's West Kingston constituency, which he won in early 2005, contains the notorious enclave of Tivoli Gardens, which Seaga had created and maintained as his extremely - and if necessary, violently - loyal base of power. End note.)

16. (C) When Golding left the JLP and started the NDM, said Anderson, he publicly admitted he had been involved with gunmen, but pledged he would sever all ties with them. Anderson opined that Golding was forced to reconnect with the criminal element in his constituency in order to connect with an important element of his base, show his toughness, and win his parliamentary seat. This, Anderson stated, is evidenced by Golding's adamant support of the Tivoli Gardens community when joint Jamaica Constabulary Force/Jamaica Defense Force patrols entered Tivoli Gardens in October in an unsuccessful attempt to apprehend several suspected gang leader/criminals.

When Might the Next Elections Occur?

17. (C) Constitutionally, the next general elections must be held by October 2007. According to Anderson, the sitting Prime Minister might call elections as soon as early September/October 2006 if the new PNP leader is extremely confident. However, as current polling numbers do not show the PNP in a strong enough position to be confident of a victory if the elections were held now, Anderson explained, he deemed it far more likely that elections will not be called until after the Cricket World Cup (CWC) which is scheduled to occur in Jamaica and throughout the Caricom region in March-April 2007. Any sitting government, Anderson continued, would understandably wish to reap the (good) publicity guaranteed by successfully hosting such an internationally prestigious event - the first CWC ever held in the cricket-mad West Indies.

Comment

18. (C) Anderson is a thoughtful interlocutor with a good record of "calling it right". He offers his views candidly, and voluntarily revealed his links to Portia Simpson Miller. His stated concerns about Golding's associations track with what we have heard elsewhere, although we should also note that Simpson Miller's constituency, as well as those of her PNP rivals and fellow ministers Omar Davies and Peter Phillips, have their "garrison" elements as well. There will undoubtedly be many twists in the road between now and general election day (whenever that is), but it would seem that the key next event will be Patterson's announcement of the date for resolving the PNP leadership race. Whoever wins the PNP contest, and how fully the PNP unites behind him/her, will go a long way towards determining the PNP's chances of holding on to power in the next elections.

JOHNSON